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BY JONELLA FRANK

Criminal Justice Reform: **SPEAKERS ENGAGE STUDENTS ON NATIONAL HOT TOPIC**

Below Left

Tracey L. Meares makes a point while speaking on “How Police and the Public Think About Rightful Policing” in the Kerr Student Lounge.

Below Right

Dean A. Strang (right) responds during the Q&A session with Professor Stephen Henderson in the Dick Bell Courtroom.



Jonathan Rapping speaks about the role of the public defender in the criminal justice system.

In recent years, the call for reformation of the U.S. criminal justice system has grown, bringing together individuals from different ends of the political spectrum who, for differing reasons, believe the system must be changed. States, including Oklahoma, have reacted to the call for reform.

Inside and out of the OU Law classroom, criminal justice reform is a topic of interest for faculty and students. During the 2015-16 academic year, the OU College of Law hosted speakers who further sparked interest on this topic by highlighting different elements within the criminal justice reform movement.

“OU Law was honored to welcome three nationally recognized leading voices in the area of criminal justice reform,” said Dean Joe Harroz. “Two of our faculty members were instrumental in bringing these three individuals to us. Their lectures were especially timely given the nation’s ongoing conversation on the issue.”

The first speaker visited midway through the fall semester. Tracey L. Meares, Walton Hale Hamilton Professor of Law at Yale University, came to the University of Oklahoma courtesy of the distinguished visitor program of the Order of the Coif, an honorary scholastic society that encourages excellence in legal education. OU College of Law Professor Jonathan Barry Forman, who serves as the secretary of the Oklahoma chapter of



the Order of the Coif, had the pleasure of guiding Meares to her many speeches and meetings.

During her October 2015 visit, Meares spoke to a large crowd of students, faculty, staff and members of the public who filled the Kerr Student Lounge. She discussed two perspectives in her presentation, “How Police and the Public Think About Rightful Policing.”

Later that night, Meares also gave a dinner lecture for the university

community in the Great Hall of the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History on “Policing in the 21st Century.” Throughout her visit, she met with numerous groups of students as well.

Meares’ teaching and research interests center on criminal procedure and law policy. Her writings on crime prevention and community capacity-building are interdisciplinary and reflect a civil society approach to law enforcement that builds upon the interaction between law, culture, social norms and social organization.

Meares served on President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which made recommendations on how policing practices can promote effective crime reduction while building public trust. Prior to joining the Yale faculty, Meares served as the Max Pam Professor of Law and director of the Center for Studies in Criminal Justice at the University of Chicago Law School. She was the first African-American woman to receive tenure at both the University of Chicago and Yale law schools. Meares also clerked for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit and served as an honors program trial attorney in the antitrust division of the U.S. Department of Justice.

"Professor Meares gave two truly inspirational speeches, and she gave many examples of how the police and the public can work together for the common good," said Forman, who also noted how generous Meares was in taking time to meet with students all over campus throughout her visit.

In the spring semester, Professor Stephen Henderson's efforts brought Jonathan Rapping and Dean A. Strang to the College of Law.

Jonathan Rapping, nationally noted criminal justice innovator, also spoke in the Kerr Student Lounge when he visited the College of Law March 31. His address, "Creating a New Criminal Justice Narrative: The Role of Public Defenders in Driving Reform," focused on public defenders, and was inspired by his work as president and founder of Gideon's Promise, an Atlanta-based organization that trains, mentors and motivates public defenders nationwide.

The organization is named for Clarence Earl Gideon, petitioner in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which held that the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of counsel is a fundamental right essential to a fair trial and, as such, applies to the states through the due process clause of the 14th Amendment. Rapping refers to the case as the "birth of the public defender."

It was for his groundbreaking work with Gideon's Promise that he was awarded a 2014 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, also known as a "genius grant." Both Rapping and the organization are featured in the award-winning HBO Films documentary, "Gideon's Army."

Rapping began his presentation by mentioning recent events across the country that brought to the public's attention the condition of our criminal justice system. He believes certain groups of people have come to be viewed as less than human. "As long as we see them that way, we can accept the poor treatment they receive," said Rapping.

"It is this routine injustice that public defenders deal with daily. We become desensitized to the suffering. There is nothing more important you can do in the legal system than to keep us aware of the indifference and injustice."

"OU Law was excited to provide our students the opportunity to hear these three top legal minds speak on different facets of the topic of criminal justice reform."

Dean Joe Harroz (center) introduces students Sam Merchant and Marcelo Pendleton-Moreno to Tracey Meares during a breakfast preceding her presentation.





"We become desensitized to the suffering," Jonathan Rapping tells the audience during his March 31 visit.



After speaking to a full house in the Dick Bell Courtroom, Dean Strang moved to the overflow crowd in the Kerr Student lounge and responded to additional questions.

In addition to his work with Gideon's Promise, Rapping is professor of law at Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, and is a visiting professor of law at Harvard University. He previously was the training director for the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, Georgia Public Defender Standards Council and the Orleans Public Defenders office, where he played a pivotal role in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Dean A. Strang, a defense attorney in the Netflix original docu-series "Making a Murderer," visited OU Law April 4 to talk about the true-crime series and its impact on the criminal justice system. Professor Henderson led a Q&A session in the filled-to-capacity Dick Bell Courtroom while the event was simulcast for viewing in the Kerr Student Lounge to an overflow crowd. Strang also appeared in person there and answered questions.

Strang, a practicing attorney in Madison, Wisconsin, and an adjunct professor at two of Wisconsin's universities, is best known for representing murder

defendant Steven Avery, the central figure in "Making a Murderer." The 10-part series, watched by 19.3 million viewers, tells the story of Avery, who served 18 years for sexual assault before being exonerated by DNA evidence. Following his exoneration, he filed a civil action against Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, as well as the county's former sheriff and district attorney who had investigated and prosecuted the criminal case. Prior to settlement of the lawsuit, Avery was charged with the murder of another woman, convicted and imprisoned for life without the possibility of parole.

Strang is pleased the defense team agreed to cooperate with the filmmakers because the series has inspired a conversation about the criminal justice system and the presumption of innocence, which he maintains was absent in the case against Avery. Strang believes a pre-trial media conference in which grisly details of the crime were made public by prosecutors caused an "irretrievable" loss of the presumption of innocence.

"On both a personal and professional level, it was a tremendous privilege to bring Dean and Jonathan to OU Law," said Henderson. "I'm a huge admirer of the work they do, of the character they bring to that work, and of what they are trying to do for criminal justice in this country. As our students and everyone else in attendance at both events could readily attest, there is good reason they are two of the most talked about figures in criminal justice reform today."

"OU Law was excited to provide our students the opportunity to hear these three top legal minds speak on different facets of the topic of criminal justice reform," said Dean Joe Harroz. "Their insight and expertise is widely recognized, and our students have gained unique perspectives into issues affecting all citizens, which will provide valuable guidance for them as advocates in the criminal justice system." |SL|